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U.S. SAYS CONTRAS GET MORE SUPPLIES

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 11 — Beginning about six months ago, the rebels fighting the Sandinista Government in Nicaragua began to receive significantly more arms and materiel, overcoming severe logistical problems that had frustrated delivery of supplies, according to Government officials.

They said the stepped-up pace in deliveries had been detected by American intelligence, which closely monitors the supplies available to the rebels, popularly known as contras. Some officials familiar with the reports say they clearly indicate that the contras suddenly developed the ability to acquire greater quantities of heavy equipment.

Administration officials, from President Reagan on down, have denied there was any Government involvement in the operation of a plane bringing military supplies to the rebels that was shot down this week in Nicaragua.

On the crucial questions of who was involved in the supply network, how the plane was financed and whether any American officials were involved, the Central Intelligence Agency told Congress this week that it had no information. The agency has said it was not involved in any way in the flight of the cargo plane downed over Nicaragua.

Use of Salvador Base Cited

Both members of Congress and a retired military officer contended that the use of the Ilopango air base in El Salvador by the plane that was shot down strongly suggested the involvement of United States Government officials. The retired officer said the base was heavily guarded, with identity cards allowing entrance issued to Americans only if they were approved by United States officials.

Representative Michael D. Barnes, Democrat of Maryland, said: "It is inconceivable that planes operating out of Ilopango were doing so without the knowledge and support of the United States Government. That air base in El Salvador is totally financed by the United States Government and is the center of military operations that we have a very direct role in."

"It is inconceivable that this abundance of Americans was doing this on their own," Mr. Barnes added. "It may be the people were not paid by the C.I.A. The important question, then, is who helped them get on to that base."

Several officials also said the C.I.A. owned a building on the base within sight of the runway from which the supply missions were taking off.

Nearly two and a half years ago, Congress cut off American military aid to the rebels. According to Government officials, the rebels began relying on small, poorly maintained aircraft with Latin American pilots. Several were shot down by Nicaraguan forces.

Account by Surviving Crewman

The plane that was downed this week was apparently part of the expanded operation. Eugene Hasenfus, the surviving crewman, who was captured by the Sandinistas, said this week at a news conference Managua that he was hired about five months ago to join an operation supplying the contras that was run out of an airfield in El Salvador.

Mr. Hasenfus said that he was paid \$3,000 a month plus expenses, and that he and 25 associates had ferried more than 130,000 pounds of equipment to the rebels.

American officials have repeatedly denied any role in directing this expanded supply operation. They have said the contras and their supporters assembled a network for supplies independent of any United States Government involvement. But some officials have said White House and Pentagon officials had continued to maintain ties to the rebels, described by one official as "oversight."

Elliott Abrams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, said this week: "There's no United States Government involvement direct or indirect. What there is is a kind of old boy network. Flying into hostile fire is not something everybody knows how to do."

"When the contras needed to do it, they looked for people who had worked together before, whether in Vietnam or Air America," he said, referring to the airline once owned by the C.I.A.

Backgrounds With C.I.A.

Several of those associated with the mission had a background with the C.I.A. Mr. Hasenfus said the pilot killed in the crash, William J. Cooper, had worked for Air America in Southeast Asia in the 1960's and 1970's.

Mr. Hasenfus also said two American employees of the C.I.A. worked at a base in El Salvador, overseeing housing, transportation, refueling and some flight plans. The C.I.A. has emphatically denied this charge, but it has told Congress that one of people named by Mr. Hasenfus was a longtime veteran of Air America.

In briefings this week, the C.I.A. continued to insist it was not involved in the incident. According to Congressional sources, agency officials told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this week in a closed session that it had not collected intelligence on the private Americans who have been aiding the contras.

The agency officials told the committee that they were barred by law from collecting intelligence about the activities of Americans abroad unless it was being used for a counterintelligence investigation. Agency officials were said to have read the committee members the text of cablegrams sent to C.I.A. station chiefs in Latin America that ordered them to avoid the private fund-raisers.